

Theoretical Framework

Ultimately, we will develop and assess a theoretical model relating public attitudes regarding the importance of the Albemarle-Pamlico resources, the appropriateness of particular management alternatives, and individual background characteristics that influence these attitudes. This will be accomplished in two phases. Phase I examines basic attitudes and opinions. Phase II assesses reaction to different management alternatives.

This work analyzes attitudes, a subject of much previous study. Attitudes are not just facts, but include an evaluation (i.e., emotional or judgmental) component. Oskamp (1977:19) defines an attitude as "a readiness to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular class of objects." Research and theory have shown that attitudes can be multifaceted and complex. They are also related to a particular object (e.g., management alternatives for the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine system). An individual's attitudes may be affected by a number of factors. Oskamp (1977) explains that attitudes are learned, but many different factors can play important roles. Direct personal experience is the most fundamental factor in attitude formation. Formal institutions (e.g., schools, the mass media, and government) and informal relationships (e.g., family, peer groups) also influence attitude formation and change.

Heberlein (1989) explains the importance of attitudes in developing effective management strategies. "Attitudinal data serve environmental management in three ways: they provide information about the level of public support and the dimensions of public knowledge relevant to a project, they help managers establish goals or objectives for a particular program, and they give an idea what people might do as part of a program." Attitude surveys can describe what the public believes about problems and possible solutions.

Sociologists have studied environmental attitudes for almost twenty years, since the beginning of the environmental movement (Buttel 1987). Environmental attitudes are composed of beliefs and feelings about specific features of the natural world. People experience the environment to varying degrees and hold interrelated beliefs and values about specific aspects of the environment (Heberlein 1981). Environmental attitudes are complex in that they are based on a system of beliefs or cognitive understanding about the world. Beliefs vary in terms of their accuracy and importance. Environmental attitudes are also based on deeply rooted values. Values tend to be stable beliefs about what is personally or socially preferable. Values are used as standards to evaluate action and attitudes (Rokeach 1973).